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SEEGÀ, AN EGYPTIAN GAME.

WHILE in camp at the Monastery of St. Catherine, Mt. Sinai, I observed Bedouins and Egyptians playing a game with black and white pebbles in the sand, which proves to be clever and entertaining. They called the game "*Seegà*," and the pebbles *kelb*; they played in holes in the sand, but it can be played as well on a common board ruled with twenty-five squares. An ordinary draught-board and men will answer very well, if reduced in size by strips of paper. *Seegà* requires a field of twenty-five squares, five on each side, and twenty-four *kelbs*, twelve of each color; but it can also be played on a board of forty-nine squares with forty-eight men, or of eighty-one squares and eighty men, though the latter makes the game of tedious length. It is played by two persons alternately, and comprises two parts: *first*, the placing of the men or *kelbs*, and, *secondly*, moving the same. It is begun by the first player placing in the field two *kelbs*, either on adjoining or far separated squares, as he chooses. The second player lays down two *kelbs* in like manner, and this is continued alternately until all have been placed on the board, taking care, however, to leave the centre square unoccupied.

Then the first player moves one of his *kelbs*, backwards, forwards, or sideways, but never diagonally. Obviously the first move must be into the middle square of the field. Each player tries to move so as to catch one of his adversary's *kelbs* between two of his own *kelbs* in horizontal or in perpendicular lines, not in a diagonal. A *kelb* so caught is removed from the field. If, however, in moving, one player places his own *kelb* between two of his opponent's, he suffers no loss; a capture must be forced by the opponent. If the player, having captured one of his adversary's *kelbs*, can place a second or a third in jeopardy by moving his own again, he has the right to do so.

Should one player become blocked and unable to move, the other either continues moving until he opens a way for the first, or he has to remove one of his own *kelbs* from the field, selecting one that permits the first player to move. The game is continued until one or the other player has lost all but one of his *kelbs*.

I played the game repeatedly with the Bedouins, and these were all the rules they seemed to have, but I subsequently found it expe-

●	●	○	○	○	1
●	○	○	●	○	2
○	○		●	●	3
●	○	●	●	○	4
○	○	●	●	●	5
A	B	C	D	E	

dient to add another, to wit: A player having captured one of his opponent's kelbs cannot make a second move after he has laid down the kelb captured, the object being to limit the time for making a possible second or third move. The Bedouins played in rather a loose, hap-hazard way, and I found little difficulty in beating them. Adopting a known method of indicating squares on the board, as shown in the diagram, using circles for white and dots for black, and the sign $\times$ for *takes*, I here report a game actually played with a friend on a Peninsular and Oriental steamer.

White (Mr. W.).

- 1 1 C and 2 C
- 2 3 A and 3 B
- 3 2 B and 4 B
- 4 2 E and 4 E
- 5 1 D and 5 B
- 6 5 A and 1 E

Black (Dr. B.).

- 3 D and 3 E
- 4 C and 5 C
- 2 D and 4 D
- 1 B and 5 D
- 2 A and 4 A
- 1 A and 5 E

Moves.

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 7 2 C to 3 C | 2 D to 2 C $\times$ 2 B and 3 C |
| 8 3 B to 3 C $\times$ 2 C | 2 A to 2 B |
| 9 3 A to 2 A | 2 B to 3 B $\times$ 3 E and to 3 A $\times$ 2 A |
| 10 1 C to 2 C | 1 B to 1 C |
| 11 2 C to 2 B | 1 A to 1 B |
| 12 2 B to 2 C | 3 D to 3 C $\times$ 2 C |
| 13 2 E to 2 D | 3 C to 3 D |
| 14 1 E to 2 E $\times$ 3 E | 3 D to 3 E $\times$ 4 E |
| 15 2 D to 2 C | 4 C to 3 C $\times$ 2 C and 3 C to 4 C $\times$ 4 B |
| 16 1 D to 1 E | 1 C to 1 D |
| 17 5 B to 4 B | 5 C to 5 B |
| 18 4 B to 3 B | 4 C to 3 C $\times$ 3 B |
| 19 2 E to 2 D | 4 D to 3 D $\times$ 2 D |
| 20 1 E to 2 E | 1 D to 1 E $\times$ 2 E |

And Black wins.

Games are not always so one-sided as this one; for an analysis of it see below. I devised the above method of laying down to gain certain ends, and it differs materially from that followed by the Bedouins, who usually begin:—

White.

- 1 1 D and 5 E
- 2 2 A and 4 E
- 3 1 C and 5 C

Black.

- 4 A and 2 E
- 1 B and 5 D
- 3 A and 3 E

and then continue in a similar way on the inner rows, laying last of all in the corners of the field. This plan I abandoned for several reasons, of which the following are the chief. Since the first move is of necessity into the centre square, a player should secure at least one of the adjoining squares; if he fail to do so, he is blocked at the outset, and the control of the game passes to his opponent. It is

desirable, then, to lay down kelbs on two squares adjoining the centre; but if a player do this without securing at the same time the squares exterior to the same, he is liable to lose one or more kelbs on the very first move of his opponent. Suppose a game began thus:—

<i>White.</i>		<i>Black.</i>	
1	1 C and 3 E	2	2 C and 3 D
2	3 B and 5 C	3	3 A and 4 C

when it is White's turn to move he will of course play 3 B to 3 C, and capture three of Black's kelbs at one move, namely, those at 2 C, 4 C, and 3 D. This is an extreme case, but illustrates the point; therefore I prefer to lay down kelbs at first in pairs, as indicated in the first game above recorded.

Again, by playing on the third laydown, 2 B and 4 B, the player on his first move can at once block his opponent by 3 B to 3 C, and thus gain control of the game. In the first game given, White, unfortunately for himself, overlooked this advantage, and, by moving 2 C to 3 C, at once lost strength, and nearly all his subsequent moves were forced by Black, notwithstanding that both players laid down their kelbs much alike.

We shall not, however, pursue this analysis any farther; a child readily learns the simple principles, yet proficient chess-players can struggle over the game for an hour or more. The fact that the pieces are not set up as in draughts and chess, but can be laid down at will by the players, produces endless variety, and few persons are sufficiently far-seeing to calculate the effect of a given laydown upon the subsequent moves.

It would be of great interest to know more as to the antiquity of this probably ancient game. A correspondent informs me he has seen a reference to it in an English work dated 1694, but it has without doubt come down to us from an earlier period. Perhaps Moses played it with Jethro's daughters in Midian.

Lane in his "Modern Egyptians" (several editions) briefly mentions Seegà, but he gives no example, no definite rules, and it seems doubtful whether he ever played it himself. Seegà has great possibilities for those willing to study it, and is worthy of being better known in Europe and America.

H. Carrington Bolton.

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